# BRISTOL IN THE EARLY
# MIDDLE AGES

## DAVID WALKER

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*Early Medieval Bristol* is the twenty-eighth pamphlet to be published by the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association. It is based on a lecture given by Dr. David Walker in the University of Bristol in a series of lectures organised by Mr. J. M. Bettey, Staff Tutor in Local History in the Extra-Mural Department of the University. The Branch wishes to express its thanks to the Extra-Mural Department and to the University College, Swansea, for assisting with the cost of publication.

Dr. Walker is a Senior Lecturer in History in University College, Swansea, and he has taken as his subject a period of Bristol's history which has not hitherto received the attention that it deserves.

It has unfortunately been found necessary to increase the cost of the pamphlets. A full list of publications will be found on the inside back cover. The pamphlets can be obtained from most Bristol booksellers or direct from Mr. Peter Harris, 74, Bell Barn Road, Stoke Bishop, Bristol 9, BS9 2DG. They are also on sale at the Porter's Lodge in the Wills Memorial Building and in the Senate House. Readers can help to keep down costs by placing standing orders for future productions.

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## by DAVID WALKER

Why does a town become important?[1] Strategic value is a
major factor in the growth of many boroughs, such as Gloucester
or Lincoln. Commercial factors are certainly important for the
development of a thriving borough, and they may also help to
account for the establishment of a borough. Good harbourage,
or a site at an important communications junction will account
for the continued importance of London from Roman times,
through the Anglo-Saxon period, into the twelfth century and
beyond. Local trade was always important, and a town could
thrive as a centre of trade for a comparatively small area. When
an international trade in wool developed, ports on the south
coast, and in East Anglia, as well as market towns in the Cots-
wolds found in it a new impetus for growth and for increased
wealth. An early foundation was itself an advantage. Continuity
of occupation from Roman times to the early Anglo-Saxon period
is not easy to establish, though historians are now much more
willing to expect traces of such continuity than once they were.
Many medieval towns found their origins in the fortified *burhs*

1. Urban studies have become increasingly popular in recent years. For
   studies by writers who are primarily concerned with geographical
   factors, see R. E. Dickinson, *City, Region and Regionalism* (1947), and
   A. E. Smiles, *The Geography of Towns* (1953). Emrys Jones, *Towns and
   Cities* (1966) is a useful, popular work. For a particular region, Harold
   Carter's *The Towns of Wales* (1966) deserves warm commendation. A
   major historical enterprise is *Historic Towns*, edited by M. D. Lobel,
   of which one volume has so far appeared (1969).

of the Alfredian and post-Alfredian period. Associations with a religious shrine or a great monastery could be important. The tomb of St. Edmund at Bury St. Edmunds, and the great Benedictine monastery which housed it, account for the rise of that East Anglian borough. The associations of St. Augustine with Canterbury enhanced the reputation of that ancient settlement and tribal centre. Then, in the twelfth century, the cult of Thomas Becket gave Canterbury its unchallenged pre-eminence as a place of pilgrimage in England until the end of the middle ages. On a smaller scale, Thomas Cantilupe, revered at Hereford, could attract pilgrims, especially from the Welsh border-lands. At Gloucester, for political rather than religious reasons, the tomb of Edward II could bring enough pious and generous pilgrims to make possible major rebuilding at St. Peter's Abbey. A shrine was always an asset for cathedral or monastery, but the existence of a large church alone could account for the growth of some boroughs, such as Tewkesbury[2] and Cirencester.

Again, there is no doubt that administration and government could influence the growth of a town. Anglo-Saxon kings and their Norman successors were continually on the move, travelling from one part of the country to another, and using different castles, palaces, and hunting lodges as temporary centres. They had no permanent 'capital' city. But the fact that a royal residence existed in such a place as Wimborne or Winchester, was a mark of its importance. Gloucester was a place where the Norman kings regularly kept one of the great feasts of the church's year, marking it with a ceremonial crown-wearing.[3] The convenience of keeping the royal treasure in one well-organised and secure treasury was recognised long before the Norman Conquest, and the establishment of the treasury at Winchester was yet another factor in the rise of that important city. In the twelfth century the convenience of having some of the major offices of the royal administration in one permanent home, and especially of having a fixed centre to which litigants could come when they sought justice from the king, created an administrative

2. There is a very good account of Tewkesbury in the *Victoria County History of Gloucestershire*, viii (1968), pp. 110-169, for readers who would like to examine a local town. It is one of a number of good studies of towns in the recent volumes of the *V.C.H.* M. D. Lobel and J. Tann 'Gloucester', and M. D. Lobel, 'Hereford', in *Historic Towns*, i (1969) are important studies of two more local examples.
3. It was at the Christmas crown-wearing of 1085 at Gloucester that the Domesday survey was initiated.
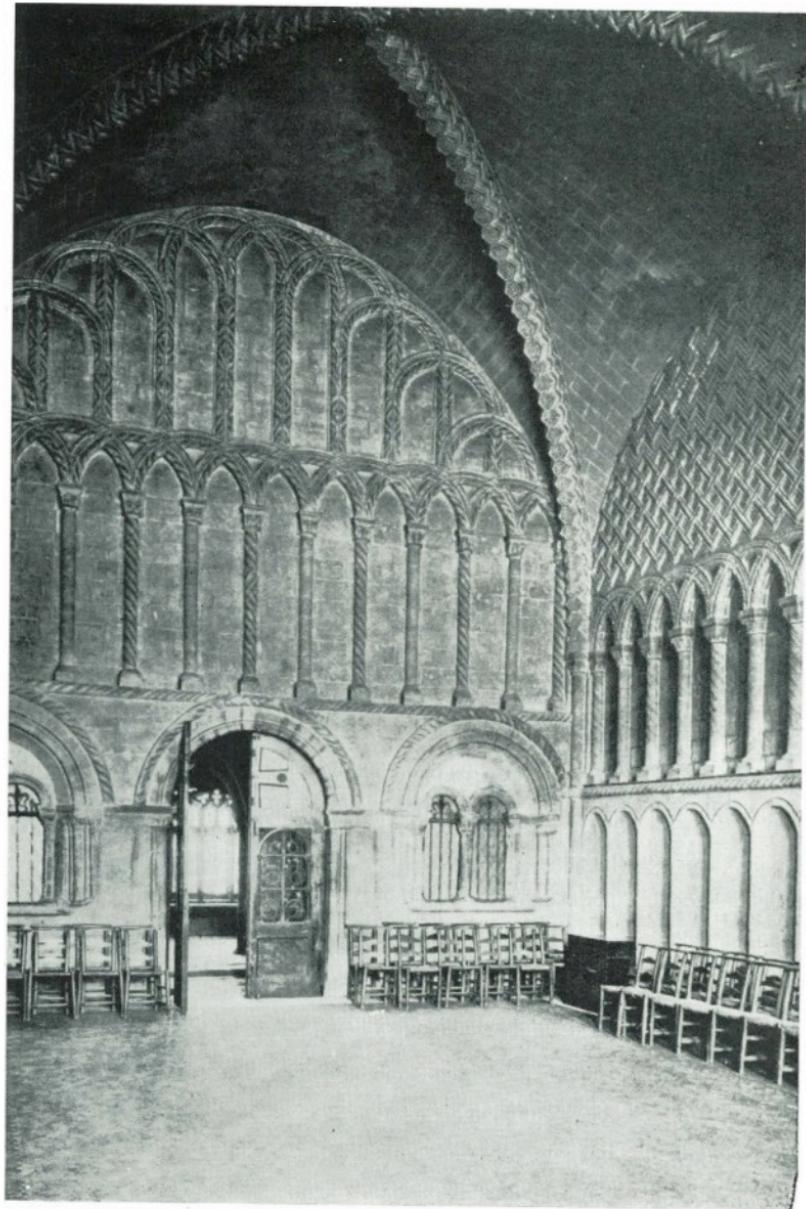
The Norman Chapter House, St. Augustine's Abbey.
*By courtesy of Bristol Archives Office*

In Bertune apud Bristou erant. vi. hid. In dnio
.iii. car. 7 .xxii. uilli 7 .xx.v. bord cu xx.v. car. Ibi. x.
ferui. 7 xviii. colibti. hntes. xiiii. car. Ibi.ii. molini
de .viii.xx. solid. R. do Rogvy recep hoc m de rege. inuen
ibi.ii. hid 7 ii. car. in dnio. 7 xvii. uilli 7 xxiiii. bord
cu. xxi. car. Ibi.iiii. ferui 7 .xiii. coldtos cu.iii. car.
In uno mebro eos m m anegodeftelle. vi. boues in dnio.
De eas tri. uaf gcti de Briftou.iiii. hid. 7 i. car habet ibi.
Vif Ricdchonifti uan.i. hid. 7 hc.i. car. 7 iiii. bord cu.i. car
Hoc m 7 Briftou redct regi. c7 x. mayrk argenta.
Burgenfef dnt qd epi.G. hc xxxiii. mark argenta
7 unu mayrk auri. pter firma regif.

Domesday entry relating to Bristol.

capital at the king's palace of Westminster, near the wealthy commercial city of London.

It would be wrong to see this only on the large scale, and solely as a question of the royal administration. The magnates of Anglo-Norman England held widely scattered estates, and many of them built up an elaborate administration which contributed to the importance of the centre from which they governed their 'honours'.

Bristol[4] was itself the product of a number of factors, and one of the most interesting features of Bristol's history is the way in which different factors affected the growth of the city at different times. Bristol is a port, and the safety of its harbour has always been a major element in its history. From the earliest phase of its development the community which grew up at Bristol was interested in trade. Throughout the middle ages commerce determined the fortunes and established the influence of the borough. In the Anglo-Saxon and Norman period, trade with Ireland was a source of prosperity. In the twelfth century the wine trade with Gascony opened up new prospects and caused a very considerable expansion of the commerce and wealth of Bristol. In the later middle ages a miscellaneous trade which included a thriving trade with Spain and the Mediterranean, was the foundation of the city's wealth, and by the end of the middle ages Bristol was well placed to pioneer the exploration of the Atlantic, and to share in the new opportunities for trade which the discovery and settlement of America made possible.

Bristol was not, in general, an important administrative centre. A royal castle was established just outside the borough, but it did not have the strategic value of the castles established at such places as Gloucester, Exeter, Warwick, Lincoln, or York. In the middle decades of the twelfth century, however, Bristol became a major political centre, and at the end of the century it was to

4. The volume on *Bristol* which William Hunt contributed to the series *Historic Towns* (1902) was a very good survey, and it remains the basis of much that has been written subsequently. Bryan Little, *The City and County of Bristol* (1954) is a popular account of the city's history. Professor H. A. Cronne wrote a valuable survey of the medieval borough in his introduction to *Bristol Charters 1378-1499* (Bristol Record Society, XI, 1946) which deserves to be more widely known. For briefer accounts, see C. D. Ross, 'Bristol in the Middle Ages', in *Bristol and its adjoining Counties,* ed. C. M. MacInnes and W. F. Whittard (1955), and J. W. Sherborne, *The Port of Bristol in the Middle Ages* (1965), issued by the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association. A number of studies of special aspects of Bristol's past, published in this series, have been cited in the notes which follow.

become an administrative centre of some importance. Of Bristol's religious foundations, the abbey of St. Augustine, now the Cathedral, was the largest and richest, but the borough owed little, if anything to the existence of a large religious foundation.

The story of medieval Bristol, then, is pre-eminently the story of the rise of a commercial community. Trade is the constant and the major factor in its growth, and, in general, the great expansion of trade, and so of the borough, belongs to the later middle ages. It is no accident that St. Mary Redcliffe, and the name of Canynges, are symbolic of medieval Bristol, nor that they are the product of the later middle ages. To view the growth of Bristol before 1200 is, in the long perspective, to see this early period as less spectacular than later phases in the story. Nor is this a false emphasis, for the general trend of Bristol's economic development, despite marked recessions,[5] is one of growth and increasing wealth. It is important to be aware of this long perspective, yet it is equally important not to underwrite the early history of Bristol because of what lay in the future.


*Anglo-Saxon Bristol*

The settlement at Bristol was certainly flourishing, though small, by the beginning of the eleventh century. How much earlier in the Anglo-Saxon period we should look for its origins is a matter of guess-work. In the earliest years of the Roman occupation of Britain, a ferry station was established at *Abona*, Sea Mills, which was much in use from the forties to the seventies, and a settlement grew up around it. Troops were ferried from *Abona* to the Welsh coast, to Caerwent and Caerleon. There were a number of *villae* in the area, notably at Sea Mills, King's Weston, and Brislington. The major urban settlements developed at Bath, Gloucester, and Cirencester, with a fortified township at Flax Bourton.[6] Bristol does not figure in this company. In the eighth century there was a dispute involving the minster church of Westbury-on-Trym, and it was at Westbury, a century and a half later, that Oswald bishop of Worcester founded a small

5. For a useful summary see Sherborne, *Port of Bristol*, which is mostly concerned with the later middle ages. See especially, pp. 29-30.
6. The site is at Gatcombe farm. See *Bristol and its adjoining Counties*, pp. 173-4; K. Branigan, *The Romans in the Bristol Area* (Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1969), pp. 9, 12, 22-24.

monastery in the 960s.[7] Evidence for the place-name of Bristol, Brygcstowe, 'the place of assembly by the bridge,' dates only from the middle years of the eleventh century.[8]

That there was a community with some claims to prosperity is most clearly shown by the evidence of coins which were being struck at a mint at Bristol in the eleventh century. Anglo-Saxon kings authorised moneyers to mint coins at many different centres, and from the last years of the reign of Edgar (959—975) it became customary to include in the dies for striking the coins the name of the mint and of the moneyer reponsible for the coin. Coins have survived from some seventy mints in the last quarter of the tenth century, and to these a small number of new mints was added in the first decades of the eleventh century. One of these later mints was established at Bristol.[9] It may have been in use in the reign of Athelred II, but the evidence is not conclusive. One die, known as a *First Hand* type, which was in use between 979—985, has the place-name BRYGIN. Another, known as the *Last Small Cross* type, in use between 1009 and 1017, has the name of a moneyer and a place in the legend *Aelfward on Bric*. In both cases, the place-name could be intended for Bristol, or Bridgenorth, (or, perhaps, for a mint not yet identified). There is no doubt that coins were being struck at Bristol from the reign of Cnut (1016—1035), and examples have survived of issues by Harthacnut, Harold I, Edward the Confessor, and Harold Godwineson.[10] That as many as six moneyers could be minting coins for one issue at Bristol is a clear indication of the scale of operation of this mint, and of the importance of the borough in which it was established.

Physically, nothing remains of the Anglo-Saxon settlement at 'the place of assembly by the bridge', but the spade has pro-

7. For Westbury, see D. Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England* (1950), pp. 40, 45; Margaret Deansley, *The Pre-Conquest Church in England* (1961), pp. 229, 317; D. Knowles and R. N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses, England and Wales* (1953), p. 80.
8. A. H. Smith, *The Place-Names of Gloucestershire,* pt. iii (1964), p 83.
9. R. H. M. Dolley and D. M. Metcalf, 'The Reforms of the English Coinage under Eadgar', *Anglo-Saxon Coins* (1961), ed. R. H. M. Dolley, pp. 144, 146, 149.
10. L. V. Grinsell, *A Brief Numismatic History of Bristol* (1962), is a useful summary of the evidence; see especially, pp. 7-9. The balance of probability seems to me to favour the view that the later of Aethelred II's coins emanated from Bristol, and less strongly that the earlier issue belongs to Bristol, but numismatists are cautious on this question.

vided some evidence bearing upon Bristol before the Norman Conquest. Anglo-Saxon pottery has been found near the church of St. Mary-le-Port (together with a coin of Harold Godwineson). Excavation has also uncovered the foundations of a late Saxon or early Norman church under the ruins of the church itself. This was associated with a wooden building, again late Saxon or early Norman in date.[11] The dedication of another church to St. Werberga might be taken to suggest a pre-Conquest date for that church also. Outside the borough, at least a quarter of a mile beyond its fortifications, though within the site of the later castle, the remains of Saxon timber structures and perhaps a boundary ditch, associated with pottery and iron slag, have been found, and it has been suggested that these formed 'part of an industrial suburb'.[12]

The Saxon borough, which has traditionally been identified with some confidence, lay in a loop formed by the river Avon and its tributary, the Frome. When the Normans built a castle at Bristol, they built it outside the borough so that nothing of the borough itself was destroyed to make way for the castle.[13] It was a small town, covering rather less than twenty acres, crossed by four streets, Corn Street, Wine Street, Broad Street and High Street, at the intersection of which the town cross would one day stand.[14] The four streets marked out the ancient divisions of the borough, the parishes of St. Mary-le-Port, Trinity (or Christ Church), St. Ewen's, and All Saints. St. Peter's Church, which in the twelfth century was claimed as the oldest church in Bristol, did not, as it appears, lie in the borough, but was the parish church of the royal manor of Barton of which Bristol was but part. It was absorbed as the castle and the suburb beyond it extended the boundaries of the town far beyond the earliest Saxon fortifications. These, it must be assumed, were similar to the defences which may still be seen in such places as Wareham (Dorset), or Hereford. A massive earth bank with a ditch presented a formidable barrier to any attackers in these towns. Trial borings in Dolphin Street produced evidence of 'seven feet of massive mortared pennant wall, and seven feet of dark organic

11. Reported briefly in *Medieval Archaeology*, 8, (1964), pp. 249, 264.
12. Reported briefly in *Archaeological Review* for 1969, Department of Extra-Mural Studies, University of Bristol, no. 4 (1969), p. 54.
13. This begs the question of how the defences of the borough and the castle were connected. See below, p. 12.
14 The Cross set up in 1373 was moved to Stourhead (Wilts) by Sir Henry Hoare in 1766.

silt', and it has been suggested that this represents 'the last defensive ditch of the Saxon town, followed by the medieval wall on a similar line'.[15]

Before the Norman Conquest Bristol was a convenient port for the growing trade with the coastal towns of Ireland. One commodity much in demand was slaves, and the borough acquired an unsavoury reputation in the eleventh century as a port for the despatch of slaves to Ireland. The trade, rendered more obnoxious by reports of moral depravity among the traders, incensed the saintly bishop of Worcester, Wulfstan, who fought to suppress it. His biographer shows the bishop spending two or three months at a time in Bristol, preaching constantly against this traffic and the iniquities associated with it.[16]

During the reign of Edward the Confessor, Bristol lay within one of the areas of power of the formidable house of Earl Godwine, the magnate who, more than any other, dominated the court of the Confessor. Godwine, his wife, his sons Tosti and Harold, and some of their armed retainers held lands in Gloucestershire. Another son, Sweyn, who had an earldom on the Welsh border,[17] was a dangerous and unpredictable man, a plausible and treacherous rogue, the more dangerous because of the powerful influence which his family could exert on his behalf. His career, which included rape and murder, was unquestionably a grave political handicap to his father and his brothers. Earl Godwine was a central figure in English politics until his death in 1053, and Sweyn's offences gave his enemies a powerful weapon to use against the earl. Sweyn was a seafarer, now in England, now in Scandinavia, and he is known to have kept a ship in readiness at Bristol. In 1051, when the king found, rather surprisingly, an opportunity to challenge Godwine, the earl and his family were expelled from England and forced into exile. While Godwine fled to Bruges for shelter, two of his sons, Harold and Leofwine, travelled to Bristol, pursued half-heartedly by Alfred, bishop of

15. *Medieval Archaeology*, 8, (1964), p. 265.
16. *Vita Wulfstani*, ed. R. R. Darlington (Camden Series, Royal Historical Society, XL, 1928), pp. 43, 91.
17. This earldom was extensive, and probably included the shires of Somerset, Hereford, Gloucester, Oxford, and Berkshire. (See, F. Barlow, *Edward the Confessor* (1970), p. 91.) In the Exeter Domesday, the lands which Godwin and his family had held in Somerset and which passed to the Conqueror after 1066, were listed with the special rubric, "The King's Land, which Earl Godwin and his sons held in Somerset". (*V.C.H. Somerset*, i, p. 437).

Worcester. There they found the ship 'which Sweyn had equipped and provisioned for himself', and in this they sailed to Ireland, to find safe refuge until the time came to win back their position at the English court.[18]

On the eve of the Norman Conquest, then, Bristol was a well established though rather small settlement. Its inhabitants were traders on some considerable scale and had close links with the towns of the Irish coast. For some at least, commercial advantage overrode the demands of morality. Great events touched the burh on rare occasions.

*Norman Bristol*

With the coming of the Normans, there were to be changes. The greatest single change was the establishment of a castle just outside the borough. Bristol occupied a slight hill in a peninsula formed by a bend of the Avon and the Frome. The castle was built at the neck of this peninsula, sealing off the borough on the landward side, and commanding the road to the east. Elsewhere, when a castle was built inside the defences of a borough, houses had to be demolished to provide the site. Because the new castle lay outside the borough, this was not necessary at Bristol, though recent excavations point to the existence of some Saxon buildings on the castle site. The castle was built by Geoffrey, bishop of Coutances, and it was certainly in existence by 1088. There is no mention of it in Domesday Book, but it is highly unlikely that Bristol would be left without a castle for the first twenty years of the Conqueror's reign. That it was a motte and bailey type of castle must be assumed. Excavation has shown that when the stone keep was added to the castle, it was built on the foundations of an earlier fortification, and there were signs of a castle ditch under the keep.[19] Geoffrey of Coutances seems to have been responsible for a stone structure of some kind, and for building a town wall along the line of the river Frome, joining the castle with the western defences of the borough.[20] Excavation has suggested that eleventh-century and twelfth-century walls

18. *English Historical Documents*, ii, ed. D. C. Douglas and G. W. Greenaway (1953), p. 123.
19. R. A. Brown, H. M. Colvin, A. J. Taylor, *The History of the King's Works*, ii (1963), pp. 577-8; Kenneth Marshall, 'Excavations in the City of Bristol, 1948-51', *Trans. Bristol and Glouc. Arch. Soc.*, 70 (1951), pp. 13-21.
20. H. A. Cronne, *Bristol Charters 1378-1499*, p. 23.

were re-inforced in the thirteenth century.[21] Perhaps there may have been at Bristol the type of castle which may still be seen at Ludlow, Richmond, or Chepstow, where there are stretches of eleventh-century works in the curtain wall. The great keep at Bristol is normally associated with Robert, earl of Gloucester. In 1093 the castle passed into the hands of a prominent Norman, Robert fitz Hamo, Lord of Creully (Calvados). His heiress married Robert, bastard son of Henry I, who held Robert fitz Hamo's extensive possessions from 1109, and who became earl of Gloucester in about 1122. The earl must have been responsible for much of the extensive castle which existed by the middle of the twelfth century, with a large stone keep, and a bailey enclosed by a curtain wall. The exact layout of the castle cannot be recovered, for it was falling into decay by the reign of Henry VIII, when as Leland said of it, 'all tendithe to ruine', and the whole structure was systematically demolished in 1655. By 1673 the castle area had been built over, and only small fragments survived.[22] The keep, of which the external measurements have been estimated as 90 feet by 75 feet, was about the same size as that at Canterbury castle, and larger than Rochester. It may have had a forebuilding, giving access to the keep at first floor level. (This feature might be assumed; it has been suggested that part of the stone work uncovered on the site of the keep represents the foundations of a forebuilding.[23]) Apart from the keep, there were three lower towers on the curtain wall, and the domestic buildings included a hall.

It was as the stronghold of Robert, earl of Gloucester, that Bristol emerged as a strategic centre of major importance. He was not only earl of Gloucester, but also lord of Glamorgan, and the sea-link between Bristol and his principal Welsh castles at Cardiff and Newport acquired a new significance. Under Earl Robert and his son, Bristol was connected with a great feudal honour, and there the earls built up an administration which included their own exchequer.

In 1135, when Henry I died, there were a number of possible claimants for his throne. He had favoured his daughter, Matilda,

21. *Archaeological Review*, no. 4, p. 54.
22. *King's Works*, ii, p. 581. An octagonal tower was dismantled in the 1920s. Part of the vaulted porch of the 'Banqueting Chamber' still survives; once incorporated into later buildings, it now stands decayed, isolated, and forlorn in the post-war wasteland of the Castle Street area.
23. Kenneth Marshall, *Trans. Bristol and Glouc. Arch. Soc.*, **70**, p. 40.

his only surviving legitimate child, who was the widow of the German emperor, Henry V. Before his death, Henry I secured promises of support for her from the leading magnates of England and Normandy. Unfortunately, he alienated the barons and jeopardised Matilda's chances of a peaceful succession by marrying her, for sound diplomatic reasons, to Geoffrey, Count of Anjou, whom the Anglo-Norman barons regarded as a hereditary enemy of the Norman duchy. The ablest of Henry I's bastards was Earl Robert of Gloucester, who might himself have been a formidable candidate for the throne, for he commanded great wealth and resources. Two brothers, Theobald of Blois and Stephen of Blois, grandsons of the Conqueror, had strong claims to the succession. In the event, it was Stephen who acted swiftly, seized the royal treasury at Winchester, and was crowned king. After much hesitation Earl Robert gave King Stephen his support and for some three years Stephen enjoyed an uneasy security. By 1139 Matilda was ready to challenge Stephen in a bid to gain her father's kingdom. Her half-brother, Earl Robert, become her staunchest support, and Bristol became one of the two main centres of her power. The other centre was Gloucester, held for her by the sheriff of Gloucestershire, Miles of Gloucester, who was to become earl of Hereford in 1141. Stephen's strength lay mainly in the east and the north, while Matilda's strength was concentrated largely in the west midlands.

Very early in the struggle, Stephen tested the defences of Bristol castle. As a writer sympathetic to the king's cause, the author of the *Gesta Stephani* reported: [24]

> . . . he led his army near the town, and when he called a council of war and asked his barons how he could most effectively besiege it, by what engines he could put most weight into an assault, by what means he could most readily bring it to submission, he received differing and doubtful advice according as some obeyed him loyally, others deceitfully. Some recommended the throwing in of a huge mass of rocks, beams and turves at the point where the approach to the town narrowed and the two sides nearly met, that with the mouth of the harbour blocked the enemy might no longer get supplies from rowing-boats, in which they chiefly put their trust, and also the rivers that wash round the sides of the town, as has been said, might be forced back with rising waters when their current was chec-

24. *Gesta Stephani*, ed. K. R. Potter, (1955), pp. 43-4.

ked, gather into a lake broad and deep as the sea, and immediately flood the town. They also approved of the king's building castles on each side of the town to prevent the constant traffic both ways over bridges, and of his keeping his army in front of the earl's castle for some little time and afflicting the inmates with hunger and many kinds of suffering. But others, and those especially who only pretended to serve the king and rather favoured the earl, made these men's sound and acceptable counsel of no avail, urging in opposition that it was a waste of time and labour without profit to try to block up the unfathomable sea with masses of timber and stone, since it was very clear that anything rolled in would either sink and be swallowed up from the mere depth of the water or else be entirely washed away and brought to nothing by strong flooding tides.

So, the attempt to use Bristol's greatest asset for the overthrow of the garrison came to nothing, and Stephen abandoned the siege of the borough. The castle remained as a secure base for the Angevin cause. Here, Matilda's son, the young Henry Plantagenet, spent part of his boyhood. Here, in 1141, King Stephen was imprisoned after his capture at the battle of Lincoln.

These factors were not, however, permanent. The death of Earl Robert in 1147 removed the most vigorous remaining champion of Matilda's cause, and in the following year she herself left England, and gave up any active part in the struggle. Peace was formally concluded between Stephen and the young Henry in 1153, and in the following year, when Stephen died, Henry succeeded him as undisputed king of England. Bristol ceased to have any particular value for him. It became, once more, a castle held by a powerful magnate.

The influence of the earls of Gloucester declined as the twelfth century advanced. Robert was succeeded by his son, William, who did not greatly impress contemporaries. To the writer of the *Gesta Stephani*, who was, admittedly, not well disposed to the Angevins, William was 'a man already advanced in years but effeminate and more devoted to amorous intrigue than to war'. When Earl William scored a minor success in war, it was dismissed as an event never likely to be repeated, and one which caused surprise because it was so unexpected.[25] In 1173 the authority of Henry II was challenged by rebellions throughout

25. ibid., pp. 139-40.

his territories, and Earl William was compromised. Two years later, the king was able to resume control of Bristol castle, which remained a royal stronghold until the seventeenth century. Little was done to the castle while Henry II lived. He is known to have spent just over £30 on the castle between 1175 and 1189. It was scarcely enough for running repairs. Richard I, when he succeeded, was content with the same modest scale of expenditure on the castle.[26] Earl William died in 1183, and his estates were divided between his daughters and their husbands. The lion's share, together with the earldom of Gloucester went to Henry II's youngest son, John, who maintained a close connection with the town, and with the castle. During his reign, Bristol was once more to emerge as a prominent centre. John's interest is reflected in a much higher rate of spending on the maintenance of the castle, and the royal accounts frequently record payments for repairs, for provisions, and for maintaining the garrison.

John was concerned to improve the machinery of government, and one device which was used, was to establish provincial treasuries in a number of royal strongholds. Here, money could be stored and used, and delays which were unavoidable if every assignment of treasure had to come from the treasury at Winchester could be eliminated. Bristol was one of these treasuries, and it was especially important for the king's interests in Ireland. The 'treasure of Ireland' was housed at Bristol castle from 1204 onwards, and Bristol became an important administrative centre.[27]

What of the defences of the town? Late in the eleventh century, or early in the twelfth, the town was provided with stone fortifications, lying for the most part on the line of the Saxon defences though on the northern side the walls were carried down to the Frome and joined the castle wall, so that the castle itself formed the eastern section of the borough's defences. Precisely how the defences of the borough and the castle were co-ordinated has never been established. Excavations were in progress in October 1970 between Newgate and St. Peter's Church, a critical area, where archaeologists may hope to find the means of clarifying this problem.

It is essential to keep in mind the simple fact that this small town was part of a rural landscape. The countryside absorbed

26. *King's Works*, ii, p. 578.
27. J. E. Jolliffe, 'The Chamber and the Castle Treasures under King John', *Studies in Medieval History presented to Frederick Maurice Powicke,* ed. R. W. Hunt, W. A. Pantin, R. W. Southern (1948), p. 126.

the settlement, and modern concepts of the countryside dominated by a great city must deliberately be set aside. In the river valley marshland gave way to arable and woodland. The Avon gorge must have been more desolate and impressive in isolation than it is as a feature in an urban landscape. In the near distance, within easy reach of the river banks, country and suburb met, and manors, feudal estates held and exploited by the magnates who owned them, nestled close to the borough walls. At Clifton there was a small estate, assessed for financial purposes at three hides. Three plough teams worked the lord's demesne land, his home farm, and the dependent peasantry had another two plough teams to work their land. Eight acres of the manor was woodland. It had been worth £5 when its Saxon lord, Saewine (*Seuuinus*) the reeve, held it, in the time of King Edward. By 1086 it had dropped to 60 shillings. A larger estate, valued at £10, was once attached to the Confessor's manor of Westbury-on-Severn, but early in the Conqueror's reign this was detached from its parent manor. Not so far beyond Clifton lay an important estate belonging to the church of Worcester, and assessed at fifty hides, Westbury-on-Trym, which included a number of outlying members. All told, there was work for 63 ploughs there. Before the Conquest, this complex of lands had produced £24 a year, and in 1086 it was producing £38 14s. 6d. On the other bank of the Avon lay the king's manor of Bedminster, which the Confessor had previously held. It had never been assessed for geld. The jurors asserted that there was land for twenty-six ploughs, and the manor also included extensive woodland and meadow, for Bishop Geoffrey of Coutances held 112 acres of meadow there.[28]

The Domesday account of Bristol is similar in character to the accounts of such manors as Clifton, Westbury, or Bedminster. The town lay in the royal manor of Barton and the Domesday account of the borough is included in that of the manor.[29]

In Bertune apud Bristou [Barton (in Bristol)] there were six hides. In demesne (there are) 3 ploughs and (there are) 22 villeins and 25 bordars with 25 ploughs. (There are) 10 serfs there and 18 coliberts having 14 ploughs. There are two mills paying 27s. When Roger received this manor from the king he found there 2 hides and 2 ploughs. (There were) 4 serfs

28. *Domesday Book*, i, ff. 163, 170; *V. C. H. Somerset*, (1906), i, p. 436.
29. *Domesday Book*, i, f. 163. Certain houses in the borough were associated with country estates.

there and 13 coliberts with 3 ploughs. In one member of the same manor, Manegodesfelle [Mangotsfield] (there are) 6 oxen in demesne. From the same land, the church of Bristou [Bristol] holds 3 hides and has 1 plough there.

One radknight holds 1 hide and has 1 plough and (there are) 4 bordars with 1 plough.

This manor and Bristou [Bristol] pay the king 110 marks of silver. The burgesses say that, in addition to the king's farm, Bishop Geoffrey has 33 marks of silver and one mark of gold.

Domesday Book was compiled by Norman clerics, who thought in French and wrote in Latin, and who were trying to reduce to a stereotyped form the structure of Anglo-Saxon agrarian society. Villeins, bordars, cottars, and coliberts were their attempt to classify the peasantry of English manorial estates. The villein, the inhabitant of a vill, or, more simply the villager, was a figure of some substance, with a share in the common fields of an estate, but after the Norman Conquest his status declined, and those marks of dependence, the duties and obligations which bound him to his lord and to the land, were steadily given increased emphasis. The bordar, whose name is derived from the French *borde,* and the cottar, whose name comes from the Anglo-Saxon *cotte,* were cottagers; they did not have a share of the arable land of the manor; they worked the land for others, and they had a cottage and a small plot of land for their subsistence. The bordar might have five acres, the cottar less, but by and large they represent the same stratum of society. The coliberts appear especially in the western shires of England, and are prominent on royal estates. Their name implied a depressed status. In origin they were freedmen or the descendants of freedmen, who had risen from slavery to the humblest level of men of free status. Radknights occur in the West Midlands, and they seem to have been a particularly difficult group of men for the Domesday scribes to categorise. They have been described as 'superior peasants'. They were free men, and their duties were not essentially agricultural in character. They were 'riding men fulfilling the law of riding men', who did escort duties for their lords, or acted as responsible messengers. Norman tax-collectors did not know quite what to make of them.

The sad thing for the modern historian is that Domesday Book did not distinguish more sharply between manor and borough, and that the Norman clerks did not write at greater length about the men who lived in Bristol. The one important indication of identity

was that the burgesses could speak for themselves. The men of the shire, the men of the hundred — these normally vouch for the accuracy of Domesday's information. At Bristol the burgesses could declare what Bishop Geoffrey claimed from their town.

An attempt has been made to estimate the revenues due from the borough and the manor, though the estimate does not command confidence.[30] Bishop Geoffrey's payment of thirty-three marks of silver and one of gold has been taken as the equivalent of the payment known as the third penny, a traditional division of the revenue of shire or borough normally reserved for the earl who held sway there. If his share represents a third of the revenue of Bristol, the whole can be calculated. A mark of gold is counted as nine of silver, so that a third of the borough's revenues would be forty-two marks (£28), and the full revenue would be one hundred and twenty-six marks (£84). The revenue of the manor on this estimate would be twenty-six marks (£17 6s. 8d.).

With no reliable indication of population, no hint of industry in the town, and no firm knowledge of the trade of Bristol in 1086, there is no means of testing this figure. It stands or falls by the assumption that Bishop Geoffrey's payment was the third penny of the borough.

There are striking contrasts between Bristol and other towns of which more is known in the eleventh century, and, notably, two of the wealthiest boroughs in England, York and Lincoln. York was assessed at £53 in the time of King Edward, and by 1086 this figure had been increased to an annual payment of £100. The population of York in the eleventh century suggests a large and wealthy community. It has been estimated that, in 1066, the population was of the order of 8,000 to 9,000, and even though this was much reduced in the early troubled years of the Conqueror's reign, the population was still of the order of 4,000 in 1086.[31] Lincoln, which again was valued at £100, had a population of 6,350 in 1066, and this had dropped appreciably by 1086 to a figure which cannot have been less than 4,000.[32] At Lincoln, the borough extended over a considerable area, from the single

30. This follows H. A. Cronne's reconstruction (*Bristol Charters 1373-1499*, p. 21). Professor Cronne insisted that £84 was no more than a 'probable' or 'possible' farm (pp. 22, 43).
31. *V.C.H. York, The City of York* (1961), pp. 19, 22.
32. J. W. F. Hill, *Medieval Lincoln* (1948), p. 54.

promontory which stands high above the neighbouring country-side, down onto the plain below. Of this, the upper city alone, in which about one-third of the population lived, covered an area of 41 acres.[33] Colchester, with an annual render of £82 (in addition to £5 paid to the sheriff), was a sizeable borough, with a walled area of 108 acres.[34] At Norwich and Thetford, to take another index of size, there were a large number of burgesses; Norwich had 1,320, while Thetford had 943 in 1066, and 720 still in 1086.[35] To attempt similar correlations for Bristol does not encourage confidence in the estimate of the Domesday value of the borough. Rather, does it underline the difficulties which must be explained away. On the erroneous assumption that there were eleven parishes in Bristol at the time of the Conquest, it has been estimated that there was a population of 2,310 in Bristol in 1086.[36] That the parish structure of the medieval borough had been so much extended by 1086 is doubtful in the extreme. Within a walled area of approximately twenty acres, a population of 2,310 would imply a settlement pattern of about twenty tenements to the acre, which, by any standard, is very high density for the eleventh century.[37] Even if these factors are ignored, and if the figure of 2,310 is not (as I suspect it to be) a considerable over-estimate, it would remain a small population to produce a render of £84. Should we assume a large suburban development? Or should we assume a large income from trade to account for this high assessment? Whatever line of enquiry we follow, the estimate of £84 as the value of Bristol in 1086 must be viewed with extreme caution, and cannot be accepted with confidence.

The absence of any reliable figure for 1086 means that it is not possible to attempt with any hope of success, first of all to assess the relative position of Bristol in relation to other boroughs in the eleventh century, and secondly to gauge the scale of the borough's growth during the period 1086-1200. London, the greatest city in England in the eleventh century, stood in a class of its own, and it

33. ibid., p. 55.
34. *V.C.H. Essex* (1903), i, p. 414.
35. *V.C.H. Norfolk* (1906), ii, pp. 35, 36, 48.
36. J. C. Russell, *British Medieval Population* (1948), pp. 50, 286. Russell argued that there were eleven parishes in Bristol at the time of the Conquest, and assumed 210 people for each parish.
37. Two examples may be cited. At Lincoln, in the late eleventh century, there were probably $6\frac{1}{4}$ tenements to the acre in part of the lower city and $7\frac{1}{2}$ to the acre in part of the upper city. (Hill, *Medieval Lincoln*, pp. 55-6). At Edward I's foundation of New Winchelsea, the density of building plots could rise as high as 24 to the acre though the average was just over 8 (M. Beresford, *New Towns of the Middle Ages* (1967) pp. 22, 24-25).

is known from later sources, though not from Domesday Book, that London paid a farm of £300. The provincial centres of York and Lincoln were rich centres, with farms of £100. Norwich was not far behind, paying £90, with additional payments to the sheriff, and Colchester paid £82, with £5 to the sheriff. Then there were towns with a farm at a markedly lower level: Chester and Thetford with £76, Gloucester, Hereford and Oxford, with £60.[38] Where does Bristol stand in relation to these towns? If £84 is accepted as a reliable estimate, the borough stands as one of the wealthier towns of eleventh-century England. If, as I think, the figure is unreliable, then the question cannot, at present, be answered.

What Domesday has to say about Bristol is sadly disappointing. In a general survey of a long period of the city's history, its evidence is a valuable reminder that, at every point, the life of the countryside impinged upon the life of the borough. To stand on the walls would be to look out at a rural scene, with people engaged in the normal pursuits of an agricultural community. It would have been very much the type of scene depicted so brilliantly in a later century by such artists as the Limbourg brothers in the illuminations to the *Très Riches Heures* and *Les Belles Heures* of the Duc de Berry.

It is not easy to assess the growth which took place within the borough walls. The building of the castle and of churches within the borough would make the biggest visual impression. By the 1140s, the skyline of Bristol must have been impressive. If the scale was rather small, the natural features of the site gave the town a striking appearance. One writer, the anonymous author of the *Gesta Stephani*, thought well of the city which he called 'almost the richest of all the towns in the kingdom'. He described the site, 'with two rivers washing its sides and uniting in one broad stream lower down where the land ends'. Then he went on to say:

> There is also a strong and vigorous tide flooding in from the sea night and day; on both sides of the city it drives back the current of the rivers to produce a wide and deep expanse of water, and while making a harbour quite suitable and perfectly safe for a thousand ships it hems in the entire circuit of the city so closely that the whole of it seems either swimming in the water or standing on the banks.

This was defended by the 'castle rising on a vast mound, strengthened by wall and battlement, towers and divers engines.' Another shrewd observer wrote that Bristol was 'a very famous town in which there is a harbour for ships from Ireland and Norway and

38. J. Tait, *The Medieval English Borough* (1936), p. 154.

other countries overseas', and he went on to speak of the commercial wealth of the town.[39] There were seventeen churches in and around Bristol in the twelfth century. What might have existed before the Norman Conquest is a matter of conjecture. Domesday Book records that the church of Bristol had three hides of land in 1086.[40] Should that be identified with St. Mary-le-Port, where the foundations of a late Saxon or early Norman church have been found? Or should it be identified with St. Peter's, lying just outside the borough defences, but a church of acknowledged antiquity? The answer is a matter of personal impression, but I move increasingly to the view that St. Mary-le-Port was the only church in Bristol before the Conquest, and that the development of the borough's medieval parishes is the product of a later period. With St. Mary-le-Port, the parishes of St. Ewen's, Trinity, and All Saints gave their names to city wards. Two factors have complicated the discussion of the foundation-dates of these churches. One is the assumption that these churches must have been early because they gave their name to wards of the borough. So little is known about the early history of the wards that this is, to say the least, a dangerous assumption. The other is the curious fact that parish boundaries do not run with the defences of the Saxon or the Norman borough. It might be argued, as C. S. Taylor was prepared to argue, that the parish boundaries are, therefore, older than the borough defences. Taylor also believed that Domesday Book spoke of 'the churches of Bristol' in 1086, a view which clearly influenced his thinking about the origins of Bristol's earliest parishes.[41] That

39. *Gesta Stephani,* ed. K. R. Potter (1955), p. 37; *Willelmi Malmesbiriensis Monachi De Gestis Pontificum Anglorum,* ed. N. E. S. A. Hamilton (Rolls Series, 1870), p. 292; J. W. Sherborne, *Port of Bristol,* p. 3. There are later descriptions in the *Itineraries* of William of Worcester, of which a new edition was edited by J. H. Harvey in 1969. Bristol was William of Worcester's native town, and he produced a long description of the borough as it was in 1480 which occupies pp. 87-168 of the MS. Unfortunately this section was not included in Harvey's edition, and it must be consulted in James Dallaway's *Antiquities of Bristow* (1834). A new edition of this description of Bristol is planned for the Records Section of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society.
40. *Domesday Book,* i, f. 163.
41. C. S. Taylor, 'The Chronological sequence of Bristol Parish Churches', *Trans. Bristol and Glouc. Arch. Soc.,* 32 (1909), pp. 202-219; and 'The Parochial Boundaries of Bristol', ibid., 33 (1910), pp. 126-139; *An Analysis of the Domesday Survey of Gloucestershire* (1889), pp. 100, 132, 200. Taylor's discussion of Bristol churches has not commanded much confidence. A careful re-appraisal of the evidence is much to be desired. M. O. Smith's discussion of *The Medieval Churches of Bristol* is concerned with architecture and not with the problems of foundation.

Domesday mentions only 'the church of Bristol' suggests very strongly that the expansion of the ecclesiastical organisation of the borough is post-conquest in date. The consequence of these two assumptions has been a marked reluctance to abandon the view that Saxon Bristol may have had at least four parish churches.

In the course of the twelfth century, modest buildings were replaced by larger churches, and new churches were founded. Robert fitz Hamo rebuilt St. Peter's, and before 1106 he had given it to his newly founded monastery at Tewkesbury. St. Ewen's was built by Robert, earl of Gloucester, and dedicated to a Norman saint whose cult is rarely to be found in England, so that the recorded history of that church is firmly post-conquest. Earl Robert's son, William, earl of Gloucester, rebuilt St. Mary-le-Port, and the scale on which this rebuilding took place is quite clear. Excavation has uncovered the earliest church on the site, a building sixty feet long by eighteen feet wide, with a nave of forty-six feet and a chancel of ten feet. This was extended in the twelfth century to a full length of eighty feet, with the nave now sixty feet long, and the chancel eighteen feet.[42] Still within the borough, Trinity church (or Christchurch), All Saints, St. Werburgh's, St. Nicholas on the South Gate, St. Leonard's on the West Gate, St. Giles, and St. John on the North Gate are recorded during the twelfth century. Outside the borough another eight churches were in use before 1200: the priory church of St. James, St. Augustine's abbey, the Temple church, St. Mary Redcliffe, St. Philip and St. James, St. Thomas Becket, the nunnery of St. Mary Magdalen, and St. Michael on the Mount without. Between the walls and the river Frome, the parish of St. Stephen's was established, but its western boundary was not defined until as late as 1247. It was in the thirteenth century, also, that St. Augustine the Less was built.

Growth within the walls was only part of the story, for in the twelfth century Bristol expanded in a series of suburbs outside the walls. One suburb developed beyond the gate of the castle in what became the Old Market, extending as far as Lawford's Gate. Since this lay in the royal manor of Barton, of which Bristol was part, this suburb could be absorbed into the city with comparative ease. It was outside the city's fortifications, but the limits of expansion were clearly marked and were adopted as part of the boundary of the county of Bristol when that was established in 1373. The castle itself remained part of Gloucestershire until 1629, when it was made part of the jurisdiction of the mayor and corporation. There

42. *Medieval Archaeology*, 8 (1964), p. 249.

was growth in other directions, especially towards the priory church of St. James, founded by Robert, earl of Gloucester, in 1129.

The area in which development brought special problems was, however, to the south of the borough. Bristol took its name from the bridge which crossed the Avon. On the opposite bank of the Avon (as, lower down, of the Frome) there was low-lying marsh-land, beyond which the ground rose again towards the distinctive feature which gave Redcliffe its name. This area lay outside the borough, and it came into the hands of two very different lords. Part was given to the knights of the Temple, an order which combined a monastic vocation with military prowess, and which was especially concerned with the defence of pilgrim routes and of the Holy Places in Palestine. Robert, earl of Gloucester gave them their land outside Bristol. The name of the Templars survives in the ruins of the church, still called Temple church, and in Temple Meads. The knights of the Temple held lands, not only throughout England, but throughout Europe, and, as an international order they were very highly organised. In 1185 they carried out an extensive survey of their estates in the kingdom of England, and it is clear that, by that date, their fee outside Bristol was already being developed to good advantage. Part of the fee, as the Inquest recorded, had already been built up, and twenty-eight separate holdings, or messuages, had been let at rents ranging between 4d. and 6s. 8d. a year. All told the estate yielded a return of £2. 9. 4d. a year.[43] The area is said to have attracted burgesses from Bristol and 'Bristol men, especially weavers, settled there, making it a peculiar home of the cloth industry.'[44] The list of tenants who held lands in 1185 gives only four trade-names; three furriers and a smith held land there. Two or three of the other tenants came from 'foreign' places, though none can be identified with absolute certainty. The majority of the personal names are Norman or French, but Leofwine and William son of Aelfgar are clearly men of Anglo-Saxon blood. Before the end of the thirteenth century cloth workers and weavers had settled there in sufficient numbers to give their name to Tucker Street, just on the further side of Bristol Bridge, and later they were to have their own chapel in Temple church.

The other part of this area beyond the bridge was Redcliffe, which Robert fitz Harding acquired early in the reign of Henry II. For his loyal support of the Angevin cause, he was given the

43. *Records of the Templars in England in the Twelfth Century,* ed. B. A. Lees, (British Academy, 1925), p. 58.
44. Cronne, p. 32.

Berkeley estates, and near Bristol an estate called Billeswick on which he founded the abbey church of St. Augustine, now the Cathedral. A man of Anglo-Saxon stock, he had close connections with Bristol, and he can properly be described as a Bristol merchant. He was probably reeve of Bristol, a man prominent in commerce and in local affairs. For the burgesses of Bristol, however, it was not his wealth, nor his tenure of the Berkeley estates which made him a dangerously powerful man. It was, rather, the fact that he held the manor of Bedminster, with an estate at Redcliffe. A focal point for this estate was the church of St. Mary, not yet the great church it was one day to become, but certainly in use by the middle of the twelfth century. Less obvious, but more important, was the river, for that stretch of the Avon later known as Redcliffe Back, still in active use as a flourishing dock area, was a particularly good harbourage. In the twelfth century and early thirteenth century the suburb of *Radeclivestret* bade fair to rival Bristol in wealth and prosperity. The men who lived there received strong encouragement from their feudal lords, Robert fitz Harding and his successors. Robert fitz Harding, and his suzerain Henry II, issued charters to the men of Redcliffe. The king granted that 'my men who dwell in my fee on the Marsh near the Bridge of Bristol shall have their right customs and liberties and quittances throughout all England and Wales as my burgesses both in Bristol particularly and throughout all the land of the earl of Gloucester'. Robert fitz Harding gave to his men 'who dwell in my fee in the Marsh near the Bridge of Bristol their customs and liberties and quittances which the men of Bristol have'.[45]

There could have developed twin settlements, with approximately equal privileges.[46] Certainly there is every indication that conflict and rivalry might be the keynote of the relationship between the community within the walls and the community without. The men of Temple fee were also reluctant to give up their independence, and the conflict here, though less spectacular, was long drawn out. The area south of the river lay in Somerset, and for fiscal and judicial purposes the men of Redcliffe and Temple could be required to answer (or on their part, could seek to answer) in that shire. Two things mitigated against this tendency to separatism, and both reflected the fact that, despite outward conflict, there was

45. Cronne, p. 33. *Bristol Charters, 1155-1373,* ed. N. Dermot Harding, (Bristol Record Society, i, 1930), pp. 4-5.
46. When John demanded an aid in 1210, Bristol and Redcliffe each paid 1,000 marks, and the Temple fee 500 marks. With an aggressive feudal magnate to press their claims the men of Redcliffe were in a very strong position.

a strong common interest drawing the two communities together. The first thing was the issue of a charter to the burgesses of Bristol by John, count of Mortain and earl of Gloucester, in 1188. This charter confirmed the privileges of the burgesses, and the important thing about it was that the confirmation was made to 'my burgesses of Bristol dwelling within the walls and without the walls to the boundaries of the town'.[47] The implication that borough and suburbs belonged together, and might grow together, was much resented by the men of Temple Fee and of Redcliffe, but it was nevertheless unmistakable. Henceforth, the town and its environs would develope, technically at least, as a unity. Physically the borough and these suburbs were, at first, distinct. Beyond the town wall lay land and marsh stretching down to the river, and beyond the river the new development of Redcliffe and Temple. Gradually, as we must assume, the sharp line of demarcation of the town wall would become less obvious. Certainly there were buildings outside the line of the wall in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.[48] The process of building up the extra-mural area was probably accelerated by the improved drainage made possible when the new course for the river Frome was cut in the 1240s.[49]

The second factor which encouraged unity, though, again, it produced resentment and discord at times, was a common commitment in the expansion of the city's trade. In the 1230's an expensive scheme was initiated which involved digging a new course for the river Frome, and providing a new and much improved harbour for the city. This work, which had certainly been taken in hand by April, 1240, involved heavy expenditure, of about £5,000. The bridge over the Avon was rebuilt in stone, and the Avon had to be diverted through a temporary channel to make this possible. At about the same time, the defences of the city were greatly extended to include Redcliffe, the Temple Fee, and part of the marsh land which the men of Bristol had purchased from the canons of St. Augustine's.[50] To engage the full support of the men of the suburbs

47.  *Bristol Charters, 1155-1373*, p. 9.
48.  The section of the wall in question lies along the line of the present Baldwin Street.
49.  P. A. Rahtz, 'Excavations by the Town Wall, Baldwin Street, Bristol, 1957', *Trans. Bristol and Glouc. Arch. Soc.,* **79** part II (1960), p. 222; K. J. Barton, 'Excavations at Back Hall, Bristol, 1958', ibid., p. 251.
50.  The work on the new course for the Frome is examined in detail in J. W. Sherborne, *Port of Bristol,* pp. 4-7. For the thirteenth century fortifications see K. J. Barton, 'The Excavation of a Medieval Bastion at St. Nicholas's Almshouses, King Street, Bristol', *Medieval Archaeology,* 8, pp. 184-212; Max Hebditch, 'Excavations on the Medieval Defences, Portwall Lane, Bristol, 1965', *Trans. Bristol and Glouc. Arch. Soc.,* 87 (1968), pp. 131-143.
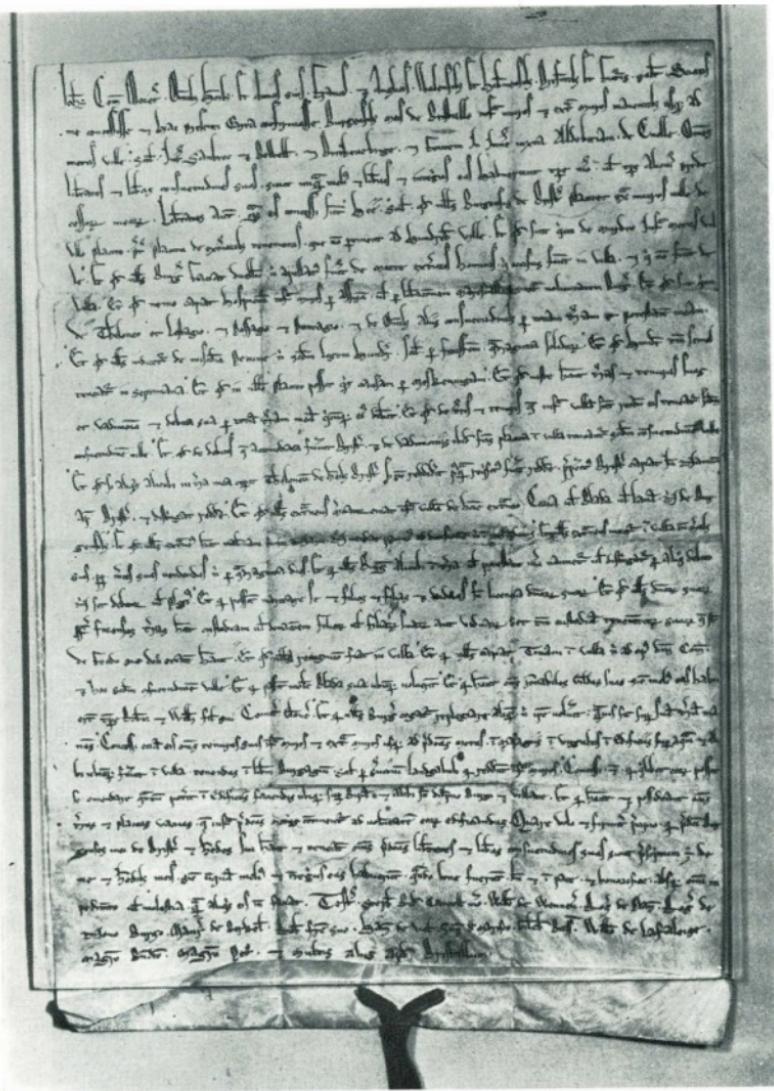
Charter of John to Bristol when he was earl of Moreton.
*By courtesy of the Bristol Evening Post*
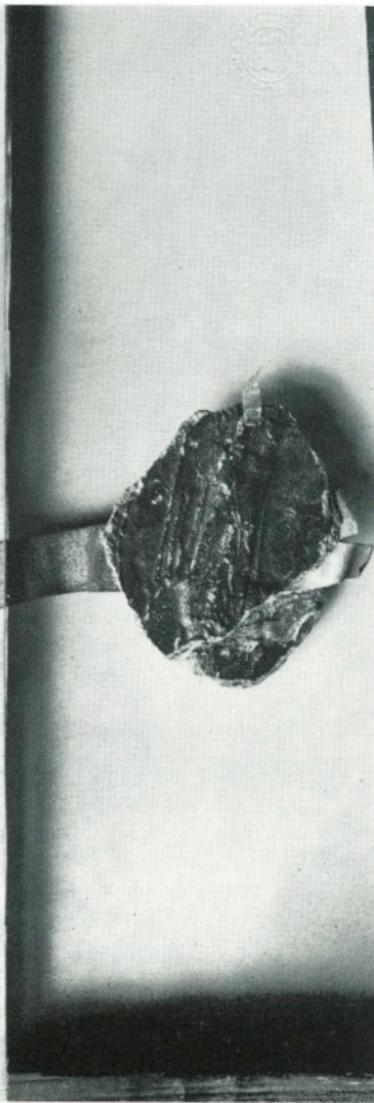
Theobald, archbishop of Canterbury 1139-1162, grants to Thurstan (Turstin), priest, the church of St. Ewen which Robert earl of Gloucester gave him in free alms.

*By courtesy of Bristol Archives Office*

for these major works was by no means an easy task. The closer accord between the burgesses of Bristol and the men of Redcliffe has all the appearance of a shotgun marriage, which was only achieved by direct royal pressure. These developments took place in the thirteenth century, and to deal with them at length would be to go far beyond the terms of reference of this essay. But this movement towards unity and towards the creation, as it were, of a greater Bristol, cannot be ignored.[51]

Another aspect of the history of Bristol which, again, falls largely outside our terms of reference, is the organisation of the borough and its administration. An official to speak for the burgesses; a group of leading citizens, the *probi homines* or *consiliarii,* who can play some part in affairs; a recognisable set of customs by which life can be governed; a gild merchant to control trade and production; these are features which we may expect to find in many boroughs. In Bristol, the evidence is slight and tantalising. At the time of Domesday the burgesses had a reeve, a royal official responsible for the payment of dues and for the transmission of royal instructions to the townsmen. It is highly probable that Saewine (*Seuuinus*) the reeve, who held Clifton in the time of King Edward, was reeve of Bristol before the Norman Conquest.[52] When Prince John issued a charter to the burgesses in 1188, a hundred years after the Domesday Survey, the only officer who could be named was still the reeve. By the end of John's reign, by 1216, things had changed, for a leading citizen, Roger the Cordwainer, had enjoyed the royal favour for some fifteen years, and was now mayor, and there were bailiffs to assist him, and other officers who dealt with the borough's customs. It may be merely accident that no earlier mention of a mayor occurs, but it looks as if the emergence of the mayor dates from the beginning of the thirteenth century. The emergence of a group of powerful citizens who, formally or informally, could give counsel and advice, can be traced from the middle of the thirteenth century.[53] There were, certainly, customs which, taken as a whole, were recognisably 'the customs of Bristol'. In 1177, Henry II could say that the men of Dublin were to have 'the customs of Bristol', and that brief description was enough. The

51. To the surveys by Cronne, Sherborne and Ross, which cover the history of Bristol in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries judiciously, may be added E. M. Carus-Wilson, 'The Overseas Trade of Bristol in the fifteenth century' in *Medieval Merchant Venturers,* and E. W. W. Veale, 'Credit and the Bristol Merchants in the Later Middle Ages' in *Bristol and its adjoining Counties.*
52. Domesday Book, i, f. 170 b.
53. Cronne, pp. 75-7.

great problem is always to identify the early customs, the primitive core to which later accretions were added. Here, Domesday Book, which can be a valuable guide, is silent, and we have no indication of what customs had developed in the borough before the Norman Conquest. In 1188 Prince John confirmed a wide range of privileges and powers, and his charter throws light upon this aspect of Bristol's history. It has been said that Bristol was, at this date, 'a highly privileged community', and that in John the borough had a gracious and generous lord.[54] By the beginning of the thirteenth century there was a gild merchant in Bristol. A writ issued in 1217 refers to 'those who do not wish to be in the liberties and in the gild merchant according to the customs of our town of Bristol', but how long that gild had existed it is impossible to say. Since we cannot see them in action, we cannot gauge the strength of the town's institutions in the twelfth century, nor even in the thirteenth century when the evidence becomes more plentiful.

There are two indications of the importance of Bristol at the end of the twelfth century and in the early decades of the thirteenth century. The first is financial. There was an increase in the farm payable by the burgesses to the crown, and this points clearly to economic growth. By 1185, the farm was £145, and despite some fluctuating payments in earlier years, this may well have been a standard figure for several decades. Then, in 1227, the farm was increased to £245. The burgesses secured a grant of the farm of their own borough for eight years, and it is no accident that this heavy increase should be associated with their new privilege.[55] It must be assumed that the wealth of the borough could, for some time, have borne this heavier payment. The farm was to rise slightly again in 1252, when it was adjusted to a round figure of four hundred marks (£266. 13s. 4d.).[56] The crown had, in fact, taken advantage of the growing wealth of Bristol to exact taxation in the form of tallage during the reigns of Richard I and John. Between 1194 and 1206 Bristol paid £1,345 13s. 4d. in tallage. This may be compared with £1,272. 7s. 8d. paid by Lincoln and £1,093 13s. 4d. paid by York over the same period of time.[57]

The second indication of Bristol's importance is the settlement and organisation of a Jewish community in Bristol. The Jews were under direct royal protection, and they tended to settle in the more

54. ibid., p. 70.
55. ibid., pp. 43-4.
56. ibid., p. 47.
57. S. K. Mitchell, *Taxation in Medieval England,* ed. S. Painter (1951), p. 313.

important centres of trade and larger towns, where their financial expertise was most useful, and where they could be given the maximum degree of protection. There are often scattered references to individual Jews in the financial records of the twelfth century, and more information, and so, greater precision, is possible for the thirteenth century. At the beginning of Henry III's reign there were seventeen towns in which recognised Jewish communities were to be found. Bristol was one of these,[58] and in the borough there was set up an *archa,* which provided formal machinery for registering Jewish bonds. Each *archa* was an office staffed by two Christian writers and two Jewish writers, so that documents could be drawn up in proper form in Latin and in Hebrew. Jewish communities could not exist without some formal organisation, and a number of prominent Jews who held office in their communities used the title 'bishop' (*L'Eveske*). In the 1220s, Bristol was one of eight towns in which such an official was to be found. It is just possible that the Jews of Bristol had their own synagogue in the borough before the death of Henry II, as far back as 1189.[59]

By 1200, Bristol had spread far beyond the walls of the little borough it had been at the end of the eleventh century. To meet the needs of a growing population, new suburbs had developed, and new churches had been founded, both inside and outside the walls. The size of the borough and the volume of its trade had occasioned comment, and the crown was deriving considerable advantage from the increased wealth of Bristol's citizens. By 1200, if not at an earlier date, Bristol ranked as one of the richest boroughs in England. In the centuries which lay ahead, it was to be a borough with a great future, and already, at the end of the twelfth century, the promise of that future was apparent. In the later middle ages that promise would be realised.

58. H. G. Richardson, *The English Jewry under Angevin Kings* (1960), p. 14. The others were Cambridge, Canterbury, Colchester, Exeter, Gloucester, Hereford, Lincoln, London, Northampton, Norwich, Nottingham, Oxford, Stamford, Winchester, Worcester, and York.
59. ibid., pp. 15-16, 126-7.

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